

Toast to the Law
CQLA Annual Conference
Rydges Capricorn Resort
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My remarks this evening are addressed to the younger members of the association. Those who have yet to make their mark. Those for whom an appearance before me still gives rise to butterflies in the stomach rather than a barely stifled yawn and mild irritation at having to waste their time explaining the obvious to the incompetent.

I want to address these remarks to those members because the others, my generation and older, already know the things about which I wish to speak. We remember fondly the years of our legal innocence – the years we arrived at work before the partners and left when the cleaners were turning off the lights. We remember a time when our conscience still required us to question the morality of our client's conduct – a time we read and re-read the statute looking for the loop-hole that lay there undetected by less agile intellects and which would win us the unwinnable case.

But where do you go from there? What does life hold in store? We can remember.

We remember striding confidently into the senior partner's office and threatening to leave unless our salary was increased to something more in tune with our expectations and abilities. We were confident we were too valuable to lose. We remember the senior partner squirming in his chair – powerless to resist or deflect the demands being made. Remember the

feeling of satisfaction when you walked out of that office knowing you had scored a bigger take home salary than the junior partners. It's amazing the tricks memory can play when you reach a certain age. Now that I think of it that feeling of satisfaction about which I just spoke may have been relief and leaving the senior partner's office still having a job.

Soon – partner. Proper recognition of your talent. Sure, the salary dropped a bit but you had equity. You were paying off an asset. You knew the bank manager's first name. Now you arrived at work with the partners and left when the bar maid was turning out the lights.

At last – senior partner. Now the employed solicitors were asking you for a pay rise. The bank manager knew your first name. You got the big corner office with the river view, the shag carpet and the en suite. You arrived at work when you felt like it and left early to play golf.

Then consultant – the venerable sage of the firm. The younger partners were jealous of your earnings. They told you, “It's time to put your feet up and relax more.” What do they think you've been doing since you became senior partner for heaven's sake. They said you were too valuable to lose and your opinion would be constantly sought. You bow to the inevitable. You are moved out of the big corner office with the view of the river the shag carpet and the en suite. You get the old storeroom, complete with lino and dead files stacked against the wall - the room next to the staff toilets with the paper thin walls. Of course, no-one actually consults. No one either notices or cares when you arrive at work or when you leave.

Finally, retirement. You don't go in at all. Sometimes the older partners remember you once worked there and invite you for Christmas drinks. Mostly they don't.

Depressing isn't it. An entire legal career reduced in three minutes.

For those to whom these remarks are addressed, the young solicitors and clerks who have all the fun, the karaoke singers who can still function in the morning, the senior members of the profession have this to say. It's a sort of "You might be able to touch your toes. (Even seeing them might be good for some of us) You might have your own teeth and sex might be more than a memory, but you still work for us" kind of message:

You might think us jealous as sin
Of the bloom of youth you're now in;
But to work you'll still trudge
to be roused by the judge
While we fret over nearest the pin.

Truth and justice is serious fare;
But your work pays us more than our share.
You might reach the top;
But you'll earn that high spot
And we'll move on with nary a care.

And when it's your turn to move on,
Heed this advice that's hard won?
You'll be happy to go
Having trousered the dough

That you've wrung from the sweat of the young.

It's been good to us to be sure
This profession, the one we adore.
So leave your seat.
Get on your feet
And drink a toast to the law.